

AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims, in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1-317. Canceled.

318. (New) A method for performing operations over a network on at least one stainer connected in a LAN, comprising:

establishing a network connection with the at least one stainer in the LAN;

sending commands to the at least one stainer over the network

connection; and

receiving responses corresponding to commands sent to the at least one stainer over the network connection.

319. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein the method is executed on a server with individual stainers in the plurality of stainers as clients.

320. (New) The method of claim 319, wherein the server includes a centralized database comprising configuration information for the individual client stainers.

321. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein sending commands to the at least one stainer in the LAN further comprises one or more of the steps of:

relaying commands to the at least one stainer; and

relaying commands and queries to a database associated with the plurality of stainers, wherein the database comprises information including status information about stainers, slides, consumables, and treatment protocols associated with the plurality of stainers.

322. (New) The method of claim 321, wherein commands and queries are relayed to the database associated with the plurality of stainers from a laboratory information system.

323. (New) The method of claim 321, wherein the commands to the database associated with the plurality of stainers further comprise database maintenance operations including purging, compaction, and database back-up operations.

324. (New) The method of claim 321, wherein the method may be performed relative to other stainers in the LAN, in case of malfunction of a stainer.

325. (New) The method of claim 321, wherein the actions are performed using a software tool that also provides a defined interface through which operations may be performed on the at least one stainer over the network.

326. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein receiving responses corresponding to commands sent to the at least one stainer over the LAN further comprises one or more of the steps of:

receiving responses to queries to a database associated with the plurality of stainers, wherein the database comprises information including status information about stainers, slides, consumables, and treatment protocols associated with the plurality of stainers; and

receiving responses to commands from the at least one stainer.

327. (New) The method of claim 326, where the responses are returned from the database to a laboratory information system in response to queries relayed to the database from the laboratory information system.

328. (New) The method of claim 327, wherein the communication with the laboratory information system is facilitated by a network bridge.

329. (New) The method of claim 325, where the software tool is a web browser .

330. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein the operations performed over the network on the at least one stainer include running diagnostic tests and retrieving diagnostic information .

331. (New) The method of claim 330, wherein the diagnostic tests are used to actively exercise components on the at least one stainer.

332. (New) The method of claim 330, wherein the diagnostic tests are used to troubleshoot the stainer.

333. (New) The method of claim 330, wherein an operator is electronically notified about the results of the diagnostic tests.

334. (New) The method of claim 330, wherein the operator is remotely located.

335. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein the operations performed over the network on the at least one stainer may be performed while other stainers in the LAN are operating and without materially affecting the operations of the other stainers in the LAN.

336. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein the operations performed over the network on the at least one stainer include monitoring the status of slides being processed by the at least one stainer apparatus.

337. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein the operations performed over the network on the at least one stainer include obtaining a real-time estimate of the completion time of any of the slides being processed by the at least one stainer.

338. (New) The method of claim 318, wherein data sent over the network connection is encrypted.